

ST. WENDELIN (CARBON CENTER) SCHOOL
HISTORY
1845-1995

by Sr. M. Zita Green, OSF

[Note: Because of the overwhelming response for the previous newsletter, this history had to be pushed back to this issue of Gathered Fragments. The editorial board condensed the history in order to meet with space constraints. St. Wendelin Church records were only begun in 1864 (almost twenty years after the founding of the school).]

When the German immigrants arrived in Western Pennsylvania from the Diocese of Trier (Treves) in Southern Germany near Saarbruecken, which was known as Sankt Wendelin, little did they realize that their efforts to educate their children would continue for **one hundred fifty years**. Our patron saint, St. Wendelin, was the Abbot of Benedictine Monastery at Trier.

In 1845, years before the people of Carbon Center (the German settlement in Butler County) had a church or a pastor, they hired a man named George Mueller as a teacher for their young children. He must have wielded great influence with the people, for he persuaded them to acquire six acres of land on which they erected a small school house made of logs and held together with mud clay. Mr. Mueller also led the people in prayer and hymns on Sundays and special feasts, even delivering sermons at times.

The Redemptorist Fathers from St. Philomena Parish (Pittsburgh) were the first priests to provide for the spiritual needs of the German speaking Catholics of Butler County. The first priest appointed as "Pastor" was Father Alphonse Brandstaetter, a Carmelite, who served the people from 1876 - 1880. Before this, services were held on weekdays, conducted by visiting priests.

In 1857, twelve years after the initial school was

built, the log building had become too small for a school and a place of prayer. The people then added an extension on the North side of the building specifically for church services.

For more than a quarter century, classes were conducted in the old log school building which was quite weather-beaten by this time. Therefore, a number of the people discussed the possibility and necessity of building a new school. A meeting was called to further discuss and decide this possibility. However, at this meeting a group of "prominent members" of the community vigorously opposed the idea. Their reasoning was that since there were some hopes of getting "their own priest," they contended that a new church was more imperative and the old school/church building could be used entirely for the school.

Father Norbert Bausch, O.C.C., who had been coming from Butler once a month to offer Holy Mass, called a general meeting and the discussion ended favorably with the decision to build the church and to use the old chapel to increase the school space. A committee was chosen, the plans drawn up and in September 1875, the new church building was begun. Rev. J. Hickey, Vicar General of the Pittsburgh Diocese, dedicated the new church on January 16, 1876. At this time, there were eighteen families in the parish and twenty-four children attending the school.

For nearly fifty years, classes were held in the old school/chapel building. However, when Fr. Cassion Hartle came in 1894, he began some improvements in the school. And when his successor, Fr. Bonaventure Becker came, he had the St. Wendelin school house completely renovated.

By 1902, the enrollment at St. Wendelin School had more than doubled, reaching forty-nine students. When Fr. Cornelius Pekari became pastor in 1911, he realized the imminent need for a new and bigger school because of the



increasing enrollment. Therefore, through his untiring efforts, the cornerstone for the new school was laid in 1912. The old school building was dismantled and the new school was finished.

In 1914, Fr. Boniface Weckman began the first children's choir at St. Wendelin. These young voices provided the singing for High Masses, Vespers and Funerals. This choir still exists today. Formal graduation ceremonies were inaugurated in 1919 by Fr. Marcellus Horn.

When Fr. Oswald Greiner became pastor in 1924, he brought an undaunted energy to the school. He used every opportunity to up-grade and modernize the school. What Fr. Oswald considered his greatest contribution to St. Wendelin was that he succeeded in getting a Religious Community of Sisters to administer and staff the school. On August 27, 1927, three Sisters of St. Francis (Millvale) arrived with Sr. Angeline Graner as Principal. A Convent was built for these Sisters and was blessed on September 1, 1927. This Religious Community still administers the school to the present day.

With the 1930s came the depression years. St. Wendelin School progressed as usual. One difference was that as long as weather permitted, the children walked to and from school bare-footed in order to save shoe soles. When the soles did wear through, rubber soles were glued on to make them last another season.

By 1950, St. Wendelin Parish had 136 families and the school had an enrollment of 140 children. Fr. Linuw Doemling, OFM, was pastor from 1949 to 1962. He was completely untiring in his efforts to serve the people of St. Wendelin, both spiritually and materially. He mowed the lawns of the Church Rectory and Convent. He drove the school bus. He worked right with the people in every endeavor including the building of the addition to the

school.

Many improvements have taken place in the 1990s. During the summer of 1991, the entire school was electrically re-wired and a Public Address system was installed. In December, 1992, the school secretary and Principal began an annual luncheon for the many people who volunteer their time and talents to help St. Wendlin School and Parish. The library books have recently been cataloged, computers have been added to the classrooms, and Spanish has been added to the curriculum.

All through the one hundred and fifty years, the people of St. Wendelin have placed a high priority on Catholic education. Next to food on the table and clothes on their backs, their children's foundation in Catholic doctrine and morals, as well as self discipline, have always been important. This training, begun in the home, is continued and strengthened in the Catholic School.

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THE DIOCESE OF ALLEGHENY
by Monsignor Francis A. Glenn

Bishop Michael Domenec was consecrated as Bishop of Pittsburgh, in St. Paul's Cathedral on December 9, 1860, prior to the Civil War. The Civil War, and the post-war period, were very difficult times. Because he was of Spanish birth, Bishop Domenec was commissioned by the United States Government to present the cause of the Union before the Government of Spain, and it is recorded that of all such commissions, he was the only one who "really succeeded".

The constant growth of the Diocese, and the panic of 1873, made the work of the Bishop very arduous. To ease the situation Bishop Domenec advised the division of the Diocese, and the see of Allegheny was created and he

